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ABSTRACT

The results of the experience of a Technical Assistance Center (TAC) for three months with a system for classifying and recording actual and planned tasks and activities are described and discussed. The area covered by this report includes 15 states in 3 geographic regions. Staff days planned and actually spent and trips planned and spent are reported for each region and for each state. Percent of staff field time actually spent is reported for four foci: assisting in meeting reporting requirements, minimizing error, planning, and use of evaluation results. The number of TAC contacts is listed for 20 categories of providing information and three categories of obtaining information. There is a discussion of ways in which this information might be used to assist in planning and managing the activities in a TAC. Several purposes are listed for which these data may be useful. (CTM)

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A System for Evaluating the Performance of ESEA Title I Technical Assistance Centers

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TM800 195

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Abstract

This paper describes a system designed for evaluating the performance of ESEA Title I Technical Assistance Centers. Topics covered include Center tasks and activities, a management information system designed to monitor activities in each task area and utilization of this information. The system provides a means of monitoring the level of effort in each area and checking whether state and local education agency needs are being met.

Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) have been established for each of the ten geographic regions of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The TACs provide state education agencies with models for evaluation and technical assistance to enable them to assist local school districts in developing and applying systematic program evaluation to Title I programs. The TACs for Regions 8, 9 and 10 are located at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon. The objectives of this paper are to describe procedures for an internal evaluation of these TACs, and to discuss possible uses of the evaluation findings.

An evaluation of TAC operations is potentially very significant. TAC operations in Regions 8, 9 and 10 affect over 2,000 state and local education agencies in the Western United States and Trust Territories. Improved services to these agencies may contribute to the quality of information available for educational decision making at the local level. This could be expected to have an effect on design of curricula and instructional techniques, and ultimately to help improve the education of those disadvantaged students in Title I programs benefiting from TAC consultation. Admittedly, the chain of inference from better and more effective delivery of evaluation services, to improved evaluation, local decision making and raised achievement for students is tenuous. There are, in addition to evaluation services, many other factors which can have a significant effect on achievement. Local traditions of policy making may discourage the most effective use of evaluation data. Limited district resources, family situation or socioeconomic status of students may have such strong effects on achievement that they mask any effects brought about by improved local use of evaluation data.

Several tasks for TACs have been described by the United States Office of Education (Note 1). An abridged version of these tasks follows:

1. TACs will undertake and regularly provide outreach and awareness activities to make SEAs and local education agencies (LEAs) aware of the availability and scope of technical assistance activities.
2. TACs will act as a technical consultant to SEAs and LEAs in the areas of evaluation planning, implementation, analysis, interpretation and reporting.
3. TACs will participate in limited technical investigations pertaining to aspects of the Title I Evaluation and Reporting System (TIERS).
4. TACs will perform other tasks, at USOE direction, related to TIERS.
5. TACs will maintain staff capabilities and expertise.
6. TACs senior staff will, as necessary, attend TAC Directors' Meetings.
7. TACs will sponsor periodic regional meetings of state Title I coordinators and designated TAC contacts.

The first two tasks, outreach and awareness, and technical consultation constitute the bulk of direct TAC services to states, with the majority of the services falling in the technical consultation category. The focus of this evaluation is on direct TAC services to states. The scope and nature of services are negotiated with each state individually, and are formalized in a letter of agreement. The purposes of the agreement are to establish the scope of services, and the delivery system for providing these services to the SEA by the TAC, and to specify

ways in which LEAs be contacted. In particular, the following points are negotiated:

1. A TAC employee is designated as the primary contact with the SEA.
2. A minimum number of onsite staff days are allocated to provide consultations to SEA or LEA staff on designated topics.
3. A minimum number of onsite staff days are allocated for the provision of workshops on designated topics.
4. A minimum number of onsite staff days are allocated for the development of materials.
5. A minimum number of onsite staff days are allocated for assistance in addressing technical issues.

In addition, a number of inhouse staff days can be allocated for certain of the above tasks. In practice, much of the allocated inhouse time is used to prepare for tasks performed onsite.

A stipulation in the request for a proposal to operate a Title I Evaluation Technical Assistance Center, issued by USOE in July, 1979 was that relevant information on TAC operations be collected and reported to USOE. Subsequently, instruments were developed internally to collect information on delivery of services, and a computerized management information system was sketched out in order to obtain whatever analyses would be needed for reporting to USOE, and for internal uses. After the contracts were awarded, USOE issued a set of forms, to be completed monthly, which solicited information on workshops, onsite consultations, telephone calls and correspondence. Although the monthly report forms were developed primarily with USOE information needs in mind, it was felt that the information could be used profitably to conduct an internal evaluation of TAC operations, with the ultimate goal of improving TAC

services. In addition to a need to be aware of the current scope of TAC operations, information relevant to the following general issue was to be collected. At the start of the contract year, and in the proposal submitted to USOE, a level of services was projected for each state in order to estimate budgets and plan resource allocation. At times there are discrepancies between the projected and actual levels of delivery of services. Given such discrepancies, do they imply a need for added resources? Or do they imply a need for additional planning and information (e.g., regarding materials development time, preparation and follow-up for onsite activities) in order to rationalize delivery of services?

Certain specific questions relevant to this general issue can be posed. The first question is about the projected and actual level of TAC services in each state. The variable used to quantify delivery of services is termed level of effort. Level of effort can be operationalized in terms of the number of days spent onsite in a given state, or in terms of the number of person trips to a given state. Estimates of the pojected level of effort can be abstracted from the letters of agreement signed with each state, and from the proposal submitted to USOE. The actual level of effort expended can be obtained from records of travel. Given these definitions, the first question can be formulated:

1. How does the actual level of effort expended in a state compare with anticipated levels?

Study of resource allocation and use is helpful for diagnosing the amount of activity in states served by the TACs. However, it should be supplemented with information about the nature of TAC activities. The

nature of activities can be operationalized in terms of a typology, which, in turn can be constructed to reflect either the functions of TAC services, or to reflect the topics discussed in workshops and consultations. Given these typologies, level of effort can be operationalized in terms of either the number of contacts (including telephone, correspondence, and workshop), or the person effort (for onsite consultations and workshops only), where person effort is defined as the number of hours spent performing a task multiplied by the number of TAC staff engaged in the task. Given these definitions, one can ask:

2. How are resources, measured in terms of person effort, being expended across functional categories? For what purposes are the TACs spending most of their time?
3. How are resources, measured in terms of number of contacts, being expended across topical categories?

METHOD

Instrumentation

Instruments used to gather data included the USOE monthly report forms, records of travel, letters of agreement with states and the proposals submitted to USOE by the Region 8, 9 and 10 TACs. Brief descriptions of these follow.

The USOE monthly report forms (see appendix A) solicit information on telephone calls, correspondence, workshops, onsite consultations, materials development, technical investigations and staff development. Contained in the form is a typology of topics. Data for the internal evaluation were abstracted from the contact summary sheet and from logs of workshops and onsite consultations (see appendix A). The contact

summary sheet is a tabulation of contacts classified by topic. The logs for onsite consultations and workshops contain information on the nature of each contact and on TAC person effort. These logs were analyzed to determine what the function or goal of each workshop or consultation was. The following typology was adopted:

1. Assisting with reporting requirements.
2. Assisting with application or use of evaluation outcomes locally.
3. Minimizing error in the evaluation.
4. Planning of activities with SEAs and LEAs.
5. Other.

Providing clients with assistance to meet reporting requirements involves primarily instruction in the correct application of USOE's guidelines for use with the evaluation models, familiarization with the report forms and guidance in filling out forms. Providing assistance with local use involves helping clients use evaluation data to make decisions about their programs. Minimization of error applies mainly to the use of correct procedures for administering and scoring tests and reporting the data. Planning refers to the negotiation of letters of agreement or to planning for on-site workshops or consultations. The "other" category might include such activities as consultation on JDRP approval processes and on working with parent advisory councils.

In some cases it was evident that an activity had multiple purposes. It was deemed infeasible to question staff on the proportion of person effort allocated to each purpose for each activity. Therefore a rough estimate was obtained by dividing the person effort for each activity by the number of purposes. This fraction was arbitrarily fixed and the amount allocated to each function or purpose. While this method is far

from perfect it should be helpful as a rough guide to the amount of person effort expended on each function or task.

Data on the number of days spent onsite was obtained from travel authorization forms. These records were examined to construct a roster of the number of person trips and person days for each state. These data were examined by the Assistant Director in charge of each region and corrections were made where they were needed.

Obviously, data from the monthly report forms and from travel authorizations were not available for the entire contract year, since at the time of writing only three months of the year have passed. Travel authorization data are available for the first three months, October, November and December, and monthly report data are available for November and December.

A standard format was used for the letters of agreement, although there were slight variations from state to state, depending on the special needs of each state. In all letters the number of days spent onsite for various tasks is clearly delineated. These figures were summed for each state to obtain a total. The number of onsite staff days in the letter are for planning purposes only. In many cases in past years the actual number of days provided was different due to changes in the needs of SEAs and LEAs which occurred after the agreements were signed. Changes can be made in the letters by consent of both the TAC and the state.

Information on the number of person trips planned for each state was contained in the business proposals submitted by each TAC. The estimates of numbers of person trips in the proposals were based both on consultation with states and on an examination of travel during the last

contract year. These figures were submitted in July 1979. By contrast, the letters of agreement were negotiated in the fall of the year. Since the letter of agreement data are more recent, they should be regarded as more accurate.

Setting. The setting of the study is the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon, a private not-for-profit educational research and development laboratory. The TACs are housed in the Division of Evaluation, Research and Assessment. They serve the following states and regions, which are included in this study: for Region 8, Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming; for Region 9, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada and the Pacific (including Guam, American Samoa, the Trust Territories and the Northern Marianas); and for Region 10, Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Data in this study are presented in a format that preserves the anonymity of both states and regions. In each state professional staff might contact and provide services to either SEA staff, LEA staff or staff from intermediate education agencies, such as the Board of Cooperative Educational Services in Colorado. There are about 17 professional staff in the three TACs, most with experience in educational measurement, testing and evaluation, as well as teaching or administrative experience in public school systems.

RESULTS

Results are presented in the following format for the convenience of the reader. First, the evaluation question is stated. This is followed by the data relevant to that question. Data on actual expenditure of resources are available for only part of the contract year, so the usual cautions with regard to extrapolation apply here. However, the first quarter is somewhat typical of the other three quarters of the year in that it contains both periods of high activity (September and October) and periods of reduced activity (December).

1. How does the actual level of effort expended in a state compare with planned levels?

First, data are presented for each region, aggregated across states. This is followed by data presented for individual states. The data in Table 1 show that with regard to both staff days and person trips, all

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

regions have spent less in the first quarter than one fourth of the planned yearly amount. Overall, Region B's expenditures are in closer agreement with what was planned than are expenditures for Regions A and C. Regarding days, Region C has expended about 58 percent of what was planned. However, with regard to trips, Region C has expended about 83 percent of what was planned for the first quarter. By contrast, Region A has used up about 72 percent of the planned days and 35 percent of the planned trips. Inspection of Table 2 reveals that in most states the

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

number of spent days and spent trips is less than that originally planned. However, for states 1, 6, 8, 9 and 13 the number of days spent exceeds the number planned, and for states 9 and 15 the number of trips spent exceeds that planned.

2. How are resources, measured in terms of person effort, being expended across functional categories?

Data in Table 3 are given for the months of November and December, aggregated across regions in order to provide a global perspective on resource allocation. Figures in the table are percentages, with a total person hours figure given for each month. In November a little over a third of the total TAC person effort was focused on meeting reporting requirement, with less time being spent on minimizing error, planning and use, in rank order. In December over half of the total TAC person effort was spent on reporting, followed by minimizing error, planning and use, in rank order. A two month average bears out that most time was spent on reporting, and the least time was spent on use of evaluation results. Comparisons between figures for November and December must take into account an overall drop of about 46 percent in the amount of person effort devoted to field activities. Apparently there is a reduced demand for TAC field services in December.

The data in Table 4 are a tabulation of contacts for November and December across the USOE topical categories. Each consultation, workshop, telephone call or letter was counted in as many categories as was applicable according to guidelines under which TACs are to complete monthly reports. Again these have been aggregated across regions in order to obtain a more global view of TAC activities. There was a

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

decrease of about 10 percent in the total number of contacts from November to December, which is consistent with the decrease observed in Table 3. The ten categories (excluding "other") showing the most activity, ranked in order based on a two month average of the number of contacts, are: planning, data processing, test selection, other testing, obtaining information from other TACs, Model A, reporting, obtaining information from USOE, providing general information on TAC/TIERS and quality control.

DISCUSSION

Data in Table 1 are useful for (1) monitoring TAC expenditures for travel, (2) alerting TAC to examine possible causes for discrepancies in projected and actual levels of service, e.g., seasonal fluctuations, changes in mode of service delivery, reflections of state or local agencies' request for services. TACs will be more likely to detect changes in client needs or status given these data and, thus, more sensitive to needs to alter services, e.g., increase or decrease estimates or plan relatively fewer but longer field trips. The results displayed in Table 2 comparing actual with planned levels of effort indicate that more activity than originally anticipated is taking place in states 1, 6, 8, 9, and 13. There are several possible reasons for this. One could be a change in a state's philosophy regarding TAC activities. In state 13, for instance, SEA representatives have recently expressed an interest in permitting more frequent contacts between the TAC and LEAs. A different cause could be seasonal fluctuations in a particular state, depending on SEA scheduling of TAC activities. This could be responsible either for more activity than expected or less

activity than expected. The latter possibility may be operating in state 11, for instance. There were several intensive workshop swings over the summer in this state, which apparently satisfied immediate technical assistance needs. This has led to a decline in the amount of subsequent activity in this state.

Where actual levels of effort substantially exceed or are less than what was planned it would be useful to reexamine the relationship of the state to its TAC. It may be that these discrepancies can be explained by contextual factors, such as in states 11 and 13. Or, where levels of effort are less than expected, it may be that the TAC is "working itself out of a job," in the sense that it is providing SEA staff with the skills needed to provide appropriate technical assistance to LEAs within the state and TAC services are no longer needed on a routine basis. Or, possibly through inadvertance, it could be that needed services are not requested and/or delivered.

Closer attention should be given to discrepancies between actual and planned numbers of staff days than between actual and planned numbers of trips. The staff day data are more recent and based on the SEA's perception of need within the state. By contrast the person trip data are several months older and are based in part on an extrapolation from previous years. However, the person trip data can be used to confirm trends in the person day data.

Interpretation of the results in Table 3, showing the percentages of person effort expended in various functional categories in November and December, should be tempered with the expectation that TACs will engage in different activities at different times of the year. For instance, during the first quarter of the contract year, October, November and December, one would expect more time to be spent orienting LEA staff to

new report forms and regulations. This is borne out by the Table 3 results, where an average of 47 percent of the total person effort was spent providing assistance for meeting reporting requirements. During the first and third quarters, when fall and spring testing is in progress, more time should be spent on testing and the appropriate quality control measures for data. More time during the first quarter should be spent on planning than at other times, since this is when letters of agreement were negotiated and plans established. The planning will probably shift to the fourth quarter, for subsequent years. The most appropriate time to help LEAs plan for local use of evaluation data would be either before the school year begins or at the beginning of the year. This would fall in the third and fourth quarter.

The decline of total person effort expended from November to December can be interpreted as a seasonal effect. December is a relatively quiet month in that schools tend to be preoccupied with the end of the fall semester and with the forthcoming vacation. Certainly by December most of the fall testing is finished.

Table 3 results may be a useful indication of SEA and LEA needs as perceived by these agencies. This is because many TAC activities are a response to specific requests originating in the states. Based on an admittedly restricted sample of data, the highest priority seems to be satisfying reporting requirements. Looking at a two month average of the figures, planning and minimizing error are approximately tied in importance. Current interest in quality control and minimizing error can be interpreted in light of USOE interest in having LEAs and SEAs strive to meet technical standards in implementing and reporting evaluations. Relatively less time has been spent so far on exploring possibilities for

local use of evaluation outcomes. Given that a common rationale for conducting evaluations is to produce data which are helpful in making program decisions, this result can be interpreted as an indication of a need for a more deliberate effort to work on local use. It will be helpful to study trends in this area to determine if the focus for TAC services moves toward use and away from reporting requirements.

The results of Table 4, showing a decrease in the number of contacts from November to December, confirms the same trend shown in Table 3. With the exception of those topics having to do with obtaining information from other TACs and from USOE, those topics with the greatest number of contacts can be interpreted as those of greatest interest as reflected by freqnency; these do not reflect relative amounts of staff or TAC time to SEAs and LEAs. Again, this is because most TAC activities are in response to needs expressed from the clients. The first of these, data processing, involves methods for aggregating individual student data into classroom, district and state level reports. The relative emphasis on testing and test selection can be interpreted in light of USOE's guidelines for implementing the evaluation models, e.g., Model A, many of which address testing practices. The results appear to show that most concern was with satisfying reporting requirements. Less emphasis is placed on finding applications of evaluation outcomes.

It is proposed that data such as those presented in this discussion serve several useful purposes:

1. They meet TAC requirements for reporting to USOE.
2. Questions about the focus of TAC services are raised with implications for TAC objectives.

3. Levels of effort can be monitored and balanced across states or adjusted if needed.
4. Trends in TAC services can be analyzed for consistency with TAC purpose.
5. Areas for materials development or other TAC support can be identified via topics for TAC services.

Table 1
Staff Days and Trips Planned and
Actually Spent for First Quarter by Region

		Days		Trips	
		Planned	Spent	Planned	Spent
Region	A	67.75	48.50	56.75	20.00
	B	86.75	79.00	29.00	23.00
	C	123.25	72.00	37.50	31.00

Table 2
Staff Days and Trips Planned and
Actually Spent for First Quarter by State

State	Days		Trips	
	Planned	Spent	Planned	Spent
1	11.75	16.00	12.00	6.00
2	25.75	21.50	22.75	8.00
3	19.00	5.00	16.25	4.00
4	11.25	6.00	5.75	2.00
5	24.25	14.00	6.25	5.00
6	21.25	24.00	15.25	11.00
7	17.00	10.00	2.50	2.00
8	10.50	11.00	4.00	3.00
9	13.75	20.00	1.00	2.00
10	41.25	29.00	11.00	8.00
11	18.50	1.00	3.50	1.00
12	3.75	1.00	3.00	1.00
13	8.75	12.00	6.50	6.00
14	27.25	11.00	7.50	5.00
15	23.75	18.00	6.00	10.00

Table 3
Percent of Staff Field Time by
Focus of Technical Assistance

Focus	November	December	Average
Reporting	37%	57%	47%
Use	14%	4%	9%
Error	22%	9%	15.5%
Planning	17%	13%	15%
Other	10%	17%	13.5%
Total or Field Hours	383	206	

Table 4
Number of TAC Contacts by Topic

Topic	November	December
Providing Information		
General Information	24	10
Model A	25	12
Model B	7	0
Model C	12	6
Other Models	0	1
Early Childhood	1	3
N or D	3	8
Needs Assessment	8	4
Selection	1	8
JDRP	7	1
PACs	1	4
State Contracts	9	11
Technical Investigations	1	0
Quality Control	20	9
Evaluation Planning	9	6
Utilization	15	3
Reporting	21	15
Data Processing	24	15
Test Selection	18	21
Other Testing	20	18
Other	59	31
Obtaining Information		
Other TACs	10	38
USOE	18	36
Test Publishers	0	10
Planning	87	108
Other	34	25

Reference Note

1. Request for Proposal: The Operation of ESEA Title I Evaluation Technical Assistance Centers. Washington, D.C.: DHEW, Office of Education, July, 1979.

Appendix A

Table 1

Contact Summary Sheet

Region: Month: Year:

Category Number		Number of Contacts			
		Workshop	On-site	Telephone	Letter
1.0	Providing Information				
1.1	General information on TAC/TIERS				
1.2	Model A				
1.3	Model B				
1.4	Model C				
1.5	Alternative models				
1.6	Early childhood education				
1.7	Neglected or delinquent programs				
1.8	Needs assessment				
1.9	Student selection				
1.10	JDRP				
1.11	PACs				
1.12	State contracts (151c, 183c)				
1.13	Technical investigations				
1.14	Quality assurance				
1.15	Comprehensive evaluation planning (including process evaluation)				
1.16	Reviewing evaluation findings				
1.17	Utilizing evaluation and test results				
1.18	Evaluation reporting issues				
1.19	Data collection and analysis				
1.20	Test selection				
1.21	Other testing issues (e.g., out-of-level testing, score conversions, equating)				
1.22	Other				
2.0	Obtaining Information				
2.1	Other TACs				
2.2	USOE				
2.3	Test publishers				
2.4	Others				
3.0	Planning				
4.0	Other				

Table 2A

Summary of Workshops

Region: Month: Year:

State	Number of Workshops	TAC Person-Effort	Number of Clients
TOTAL			

Table 3A

Summary of On-Site Activities

Region: Month: Year:

State	Number of Activities	TAC Person-Effort	Number of Clients
TOTAL			

☐ Workshop Log, Table 2B

☐ On-Site Activity Log, Table 3B

Region: Month: Year:

State: _____

Contact Person: _____

Position/Title: _____

Agency: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Location: _____

Number of clients served: _____

Name(s) of TAC staff presenting: _____

_____

_____

_____

TAC person effort: _____ HOURS

Brief description: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Category number: _____

Date: _____

Table 4A

Summary of Telephone Calls

Region: Month: Year:

State	Number of Calls	
	SEA	LEA
Total state calls		
Number of calls to TACs:		
Number of calls to/from USOE:		
Other calls:		

Table 4B

Telephone Log

TAC staff_____

Region:
Month:
Year:

State or Agency	Date	Client, Agency & Location	Check if TAC Initiated	Subject	Category No	Length 5	Length 5-10	Length 10

Table 5A

Summary of Correspondence

Region: Month: Year:

State	Number of Contacts	
	Sent to TAC	Sent by TAC

Total number of letters to and from SEAs and LEAs:

Number of letters to TACs:
Number of letters to/from USOE:
Other letters:

Table 5B

Correspondence Log

Region _____ Month _____ Year _____

State or Agency	Date	Tac Staff Member	Client	Check if TAC Initiated	Subject	Category No.
						34

Biweekly Accounting for Monthly USOE Reports

Tables 6 through 9

Staff _____

Region _____ Table 6 - Materials Development Month _____ Year _____

Material	Principal Contributor(s)	Brief Description	Start Date	End Date

Region _____ Table 7 - Technical Investigations Month _____ Year _____

Material	Principal Contributor(s)	Brief Description	Start Date	End Date

Table 8 - Regional and National Activities

Region _____ Month _____ Year _____

TOPIC	TAC STAFF ATTENDING	DATE	DESCRIPTION

Table 9 - Formal Staff Development

Region _____ Month _____ Year _____

DATE ACTIVITY	PRESENTER(S)	STAFF BRIEFED	DESCRIPTION

NWREL/TAC Contact Log

Date of Contact:

Region: State:

Place:

Telephone #:

Key People Contacted:

(name) (position/address/phone #)

FROM ☐ TAC ☐ Client

DURATION _____ hrs _____ min

TYPE OF CONTACT ☐ Telephone ☐ Consultation

☐ Workshop/ Presentation ☐ Planning Session

IF WORKSHOP/PRESENTATION

_____ Number of TAC Staff _____ Number of Districts

_____ Number of Participants

_____ Evaluators _____ Administrators

_____ Teachers _____ Other

Major Topic(s):

Summary:

Additional Help/Followup Planned:

☐ More Details on Backside

☐ Additional Summary/Report Attached

☐ Name List Attached

☐ Agenda Attached

☐ Copies to _____

_____

☐ Workshop/Presentation Needs Revision

☐ Certain Handouts/Media Need Revision

NWREL/TAC Representative(s) (All That Apply)

_____ Date

DETAILS OF THE CONTACT

Additional Summary/Details:

Audience/Participants' Reactions to Handouts/AV Aids:

High Points/Low Points of Workshop/Presentation:

Suggestions for Next Workshop/Presentation Team: